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## Why adults return to school?

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### Abstract

Trying to maintain or improve their job skills or broaden their knowledge leads a growing number of people to acquire further knowledge and skills. The purpose of the presented study is to analyse the reasons why adults/employed people in the Czech Republic return to the education system (international comparison). The case study of the students of combined study program at the Faculty of Informatics and Management, University of Hradec Králové, aimed to discuss their reasons and study conditions. The available resources and the investigation show that the main reasons why adults return to the education system is for an extension to their knowledge, improvement of their position in their existing job, chances of finding a better job or improve their position in the labour market, etc. The survey also suggests that a lot of students study without the knowledge of their employer. Education and skills development is one of the important conditions for the development of society in general. Qualified people have better employment and opportunities in the labour market and employers with a skilled workforce can have a competitive advantage in this area, this is important for both sides to realise.

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**Keywords:** Education, adult education, skills improvement, formal education, informal education.

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### 1. Introduction

Education systems change in the context of the accelerating scientific-technical, socio-economic and social development in recent decades. The immediately gained school knowledge is not sufficient throughout the

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productive part of the life of a human. Lifelong learning is therefore increasingly important, as it allows to participate in the increasingly more complex reality of today's time.

In the 21st century lifelong learning is an indisputable necessity and its importance has been rapidly increasing in the last few decades. The importance of promoting the development of human potential, as one of the key factors for sustainable economic growth of knowledge-based economies, is at the forefront of strategic planning documents in the Czech Republic.

In recent years adult education has undergone a major and a mostly spontaneous transformation processes. Total liberalisation of environmental and grassroots initiatives led to a diverse range of educational opportunities and expansion in the quantity, structure and species composition of adult education.

Development of internal and external conditions, the strategy of lifelong learning, the European dimension of education and other contexts, however, has put new, long-term oriented claims and demands, necessitating the need for establishment and the gradual implementation of system changes. At the same time, however, the market mechanisms apply significantly to help keep the diversity of offerings and a competitive environment.

The term of adult education covers a wide range of educational processes on the one hand (teaching adults and teaching focused on them) and institutions, programs, methods of management and support activities on the other hand together forming a system providing non-formal (i.e. strictly linked to the school system) education.

The purpose of the presented study is to analyse the reasons why adults/employed people in the Czech Republic return to the education system (international comparison). The case study of the students of combined study program at the Faculty of Informatics and Management, University of Hradec Králové, aimed to discuss their reasons and study conditions.

## 2. Lifelong learning

A human learns throughout life. It does not stop by completing the colleges and universities, especially if they want to be successful in the labour market. Learning foreign languages, management skills, how to work with a computer or deepen expertise knowledge or otherwise improve skills - all that belongs to an area called *lifelong learning*.

The issue is dealt with by andragogy, which is an applied science of adult education that respects the particularities associated with it. It deals mainly with socialisation, personalisation and acculturation and enculturation.

It is a continuous process standing on three pillars - formal and non-formal education as well as informal learning.

**Formal education** is provided in educational institutions (especially schools), its objectives, content, organisational forms and methods of assessment are defined by law regulations, passing various levels of education is confirmed with a certificate (diploma.) **Non-formal education** serves to develop skills, knowledge and competencies that can contribute to a better working and social application, it includes for example organised leisure activities, foreign language courses, refresher courses, computer courses, short-term training and others. **Informal learning** is a process of gaining knowledge, acquiring skills and competences from everyday experiences and activities in work, family, leisure, it also includes self-education. Unlike formal and non-formal education it is not organised, non-systematic and institutionally non-coordinated. (MŠMT, 2010)

**Lifelong learning** represents a fundamental conceptual change of the learning concept. It includes all the possibilities of learning in traditional educational institutions, within the education system and beyond. These capabilities form a single interconnected unit that allows diverse and numerous transitions between education and employment. It also allows a person to gain the same qualification and competencies in various ways and at any time during life.

## 3. Adult education in the Czech Republic in comparison with other European Union countries

The results of the international Adult Education Survey (STATISTIKA&MY, 2013) implemented in 2011, show that the involvement of people of mature ages in formal education is low in the Czech Republic and represents only four percent of people between 25 and 64 years (Figure 1), also in our country there are people who, after a certain break,

return to school. Mostly their reason is to increase their highest level of education. In Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, it is more than 12 percent of people, in Slovakia nearly 6 percent.

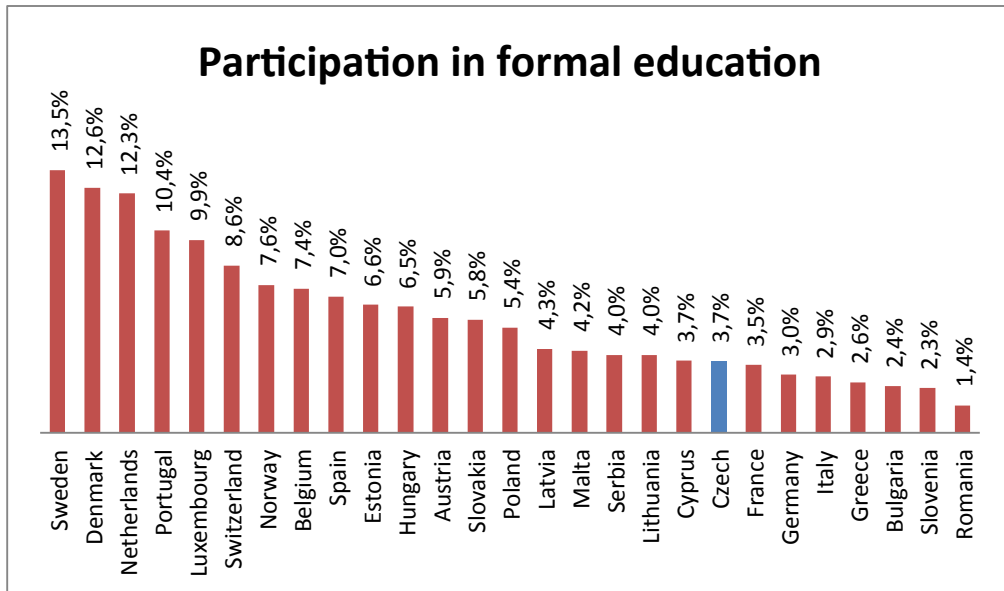


Fig. 1: Participation in formal education, 25-64 years (STATISTIKA&MY, 2013)

Most of these "returnees" seeks to obtain a university degree (32% participated in a bachelor's degree, 26% master's degree and 14% doctoral degree) and about a quarter (28%) study in order to achieve a school-leaving certificate.

Formal education is mainly used by working (81%) or employed people (70%), who mostly perform their profession in the field of public administration (42%), i.e. defence, education and social care sector. To a large extent (66%) there are individuals holding clerical positions requiring high qualifications (managers, professionals, technicians and expert workers).

Regarding non-formal education, the situation is different. Organised and institutionalised educational activities are used in progress through courses, trainings, private lessons, workshops and seminars. In 2011 in the Czech Republic, nearly one third of people (32%) between 18 and 69 years participated at least one of these activities. It was relatively common among people with a higher vocational or university education. More than half of them (56%) participated in non-formal education. This was lower among high school students: 39% of school-leaving certificate holders and 22% of apprentices.

Fig. 2 shows the participation in non-formal education by the motivation to education and economic status.

Acquiring knowledge and skills in non-formal education was related primarily (78%) with the occupations of participants. Most often, people gained education in foreign languages (English prevailed), in activities developing legal awareness (13%), knowledge in commerce and in the administration of business processes.

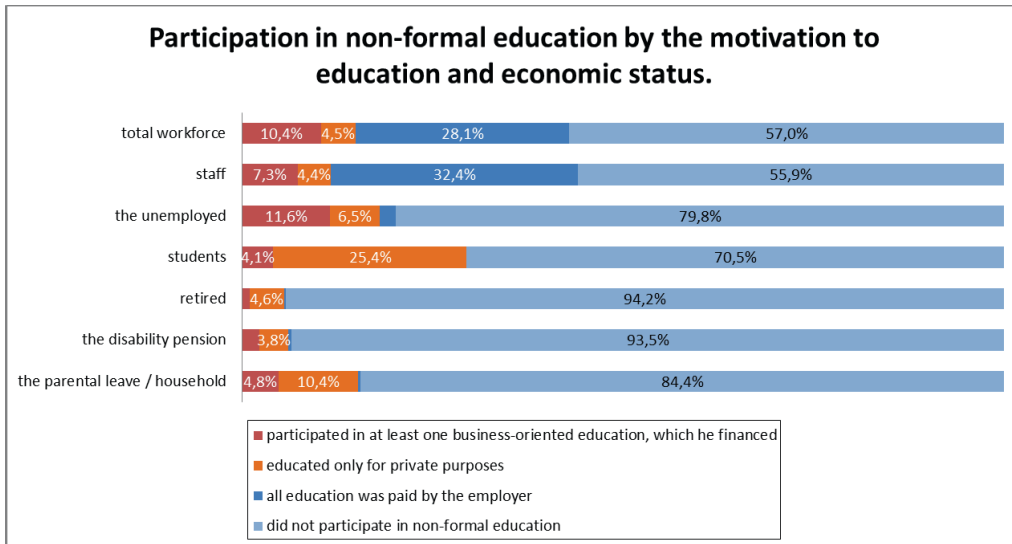


Fig. 2: Participation in non-formal education by the motivation to education and economic status. (STATISTIKA&MY, 2013)

#### 4. Reasons for education of part-time students at the Faculty of Informatics and Management, University of Hradec Králové

In the academic year 2013/2014 a survey was carried out, among part-time students of the Faculty of Informatics and Management, University of Hradec Králové, the survey focused on the reasons why people study. These are people who enter formal education and a large part of them are working people. The first phase was a questionnaire survey. All first-year students in the fields of Financial Management, Tourism Management and Information Management were addressed. It was 228 students. 84 completed questionnaires were returned, therefore, the return rate was 37%. The age of respondents was in the range between 19 and 44 years, 51 women and 33 men completed the questionnaire. 62% of the respondents have jobs (see Figure 3).

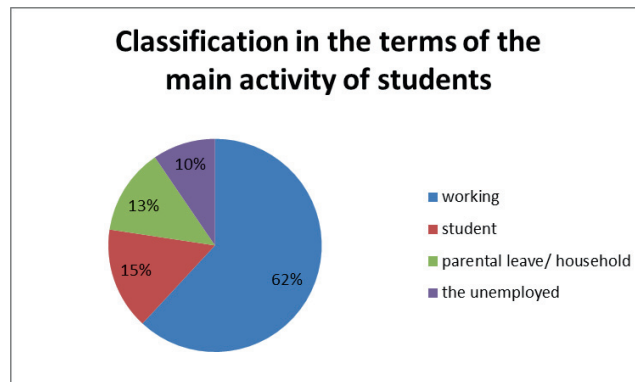


Fig. 3: Classification in the terms of the main activity of students (own source)

The questionnaire and follow-up interviews with the participants in the survey show that the most frequent reason for their studies are to attain better opportunities in the labour market and increase skills, therefore, allowing for the opportunity of professional growth, they also mentioned the extension of education to another field or personal

interest in the field. 6% of respondents who work, said that their employer doesn't know about their studies, they study in their free time. Only 8% the study is supported by employers, e.g. in the form of unpaid leave.

## 5. Results Summary

Most people agree that education in adulthood is needed, in particular for the following reasons:

- Keeping pace with the times and to be competitive in the labour market and in society
- Achieve career goals
- Expand horizons and open up new possibilities
- Due to the personal development

The actual motivation for further education also depends on the individual needs and abilities of a human.

Lifelong learning not only bring benefits to the person but also to the employer and the state. (MŠMT, 2010)

State	Employer	Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher employment-rate</li> <li>• increased competitiveness</li> <li>• knowledge-based economy</li> <li>• promotion of citizens mobility</li> <li>• equal access</li> <li>• chances for disadvantaged groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• qualified and motivated staff</li> <li>• increased competitiveness</li> <li>• labour productivity growth</li> <li>• improved company image</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the opportunity to improve and enhance the qualifications</li> <li>• increased employability</li> <li>• improving labour market status, mobility support</li> <li>• motivation for personal development</li> <li>• increased social status</li> <li>• equal opportunities</li> </ul>

## 6. Conclusion

The key pillar of success for the Czech Republic is in particular the ability of our population to compete in the rapidly changing global labour market. At present, our workforce is valued especially for their skills, dexterity, precision and the ability to react flexibly to unexpected situations.

Lifelong learning is a complex, not clearly defined unity. In this context it should be emphasised that this complex issue cannot be clearly "planned". Prerequisite for the development of lifelong learning is therefore the creation of a motivational, legal and economic environment that will allow funds to be spent effectively. Investing in lifelong learning must be seen as development investments with the highest priority, in which, the effects are particularly significant in the long term view.

The available resources and the investigation show that the main reasons why adults return to the education system is for an extension to their knowledge, improvement of their position in their existing job, chances of finding a better job or improve their position in the labour market, etc. The survey also suggests that a lot of students study without the knowledge of their employer.

Education and skills development is one of the important conditions for the development of society in general. Qualified people have better employment and opportunities in the labour market and employers with a skilled workforce can have a competitive advantage in this area, this is important for both sides to realise. Another role can also be played by support from the state.

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